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C O N F I D E N T I A L PANAMA 000520

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STATE FOR PRM (RGEHRING AND RMACKLER), WHA/PPC, WHA/CCA,
AND WHA/CEN (ETELLO)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/23/2018
TAGS: PREF PREL SMIG CU IT PM
SUBJECT: PANAMA: RESETTLEMENT OF CUBAN MIGRANTS PROTECTED
ON GUANTANAMO

REF: STATE 43061

Classified By: POLCOUNS Brian R. Naranjo. Reason: 1.4 (d)

¶1. (U) This is an action request. Please see para 3.

Panama Inquires Into "Exceptional" Nature of Cases

¶12. (C) The degree to which it could be demonstrated that the Cuban migrants protected on Guantanamo are in an "exceptional situation" would be a significant factor that Panamanian President Torrijos would weigh in determining whether to agree to resettle two Cuban migrants, as requested reftel, MFA Senior Advisor Adolfo Ahumada informed POLCOUNS on June ¶123. Furthermore, Ahumada underscored several times that under no circumstances could acceptance of these migrants be understood as accepting a "precedence" to do so in the future. Therefore, Ahumada requested additional information regarding these migrants' families in Panama, information that would assist the GOP in justifying a "socially responsibly humanitarian decision" to resettle these individuals in Panama. For example, if the family members in Panama were the only ones capable of providing meaningful support and constituted their sole family ties outside of Cuba, Ahumada said he believed that an adequate case might be made that Panama needed to agree to accept these migrants for resettlement out of serious concern for their well being, as requested by the U.S.

Action Request

¶13. (C) Post seeks Department's guidance in responding to this request for additional information that would demonstrate the "exceptional" nature of the request to resettle these two protected migrants in Panama.

Comment

¶14. (C) The acceptance of any refugees -- particularly Cuban refugees -- is an extremely sensitive matter for Panama, a country that across administrations has posited its foreign policy on sustaining friendly relations with all who seek friendly relations with it, including Cuba. The Torrijos Administration does not wish to draw the ire of the Cuban regime for accepting these migrants. It is for this reason that the GOP is highly appreciative of the discrete manner in which these cases have been handled. It is also the reason for which the GOP essentially seeks USG assistance to craft a narrative to explain why these cases constitute "exceptional situations" for which Panama needs to do the right thing in

accepting these migrants for resettlement. Panama's two month delay in responding to Post's initial demarche highlights the close scrutiny and high-level GOP attention that these cases will receive. Ambassador raised this demarche with First VP and FM Samuel Lewis on June 17, and Lewis, aware of the substance of the demarche, said the matter was under consideration. Ahumada's interim answer is basically a request that the USG explain why Panama is really the only reasonable hope for resettlement so that, if asked, Panama can in the future say that it consulted extensively with us and an understanding was reached that Panama was the only option. Panama's last experience with a resettled migrant a few years ago was not a happy experience and left Panama reluctant to jump on board with future resettlement requests.

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